



Learning at a **DISTANCE**

GUIDANCE

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Introduction

This is a work in progress, a largely teacher-written effort to help address the immediate needs of staff who must address the immediate needs of children – at a distance – during a pandemic. This document seeks to help ALL districts improve learning at a distance: those with lots, some, and little technology. It is not meant to be a magnum opus, a document for the ages, but preferably one that can be modified and adjusted according to the needs of educators and the students whom they serve.

In our local control state, with 842 local school districts serving 1.5 million students, we need to do the best that we can in each district to provide learning at a distance. “The best that we can” will vary across school districts. Some districts have been able to migrate to virtual learning while many others, given the absence of technology in the homes of some or most of their students, have not.

We do not denigrate or disrespect those who work and live in communities with little to no technology. We appreciate and respect the enormous caring, compassion, and creativity of educators across the state, many of whom serve children in communities with little to no technology. Likewise, we appreciate and respect the enormous caring, compassion, and creativity of educators across the state who are fortunate to work in communities with substantial technology.

In the short term, we all need to do the best that we can to serve children, while recognizing this will mean different things in different communities at this extraordinarily challenging moment in our educational history and in our broader history.

In a recent quick survey of technology available in intermediate school districts (ISDs) across the state, ISD superintendents estimated that between 25 and 90 percent of the children in their local school districts had computers and connectivity. Overall, we learned that approximately one-third of their students statewide did not have access to a computer at home and/or connectivity. At the barest minimum, these numbers would suggest 500,000 students without the requisite technology at home to connect to schools for virtual learning. Yet the number of students without the necessary connections is in fact probably quite a bit greater. Some young children, some children with special needs, and some English learners may have the technology at home but not the capacity to access what they need without the support they typically have in bricks-and-mortar schools.



Original art by Doug Duncan, 2019-2020 Region 7 Michigan Teacher of the Year and an elementary art teacher at Kalamazoo Public Schools

“...we all need to do the best that we can to serve children, while recognizing that will mean different things in different communities at this extraordinarily challenging moment in our educational history and our broader history.”

In the mid-term/long-term, our challenge is to take this crisis and turn it into an opportunity to close the digital divide between those who have technology in their homes and communities and those who do not. It is to create a Michigan in which ALL children have access to technology at home. Our challenge is to reduce the summer reading slide that is so pervasive among working class and poor children and that is responsible for a good percentage of the achievement gap between working class and poor children on the one hand and middle class children on the other. It will be critical for the state as a whole to work together to address these issues immediately and over time. History will judge our work based not on how well any one educator, school, school district, or organization performed, but rather how well we as a state came together in support of our 1.5 million children in this time of need. In short, it is a time for collective, not individual, action.

We all need to improve what we do for children and how we do it in this challenging time. The longer that this crisis goes, the more we need to learn from our experiences and to improve how we serve children. This document seeks to help ALL districts improve learning at a distance: those with a lot, some, and little technology.

We are under no illusion that education at a distance can mimic face-to-face education. Education is interpersonal and is made possible and indeed joyous by students, teachers, counselors, specialists, social workers, support staff, and administrators interacting with one another at close range. Those who work in schools do a terrific job of providing for the needs of children, often under extraordinarily difficult conditions.

“Education is interpersonal and is made possible and indeed joyous by students, teachers, counselors, specialists, social workers, support staff, and administrators interacting with one another at close range. Those who work in schools do a terrific job of providing for the needs of children, often under extraordinarily difficult conditions.”

That said, in light of the pandemic, our conditions have become even more trying. It is not possible that we can or should expect to fully recreate at a distance what has taken years to create in schools. On the other hand, it is critical that we NOT use the pandemic as an excuse for failure to provide education to the absolute greatest extent of our ability. We have an obligation to continue to serve community by community, district by district, and student by student.

As we build our plans to serve children at a distance, we must collaborate daily, not only as local teachers, counselors, specialists, social workers, support staff, administrators, and board members, but also across districts, across states, and across the country, and we need to do so in partnership with one another. It was H.L. Mencken, the famous journalist, who once said, “For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.” No simple solutions, no panaceas, no individuals who know all. We’re the cavalry. We need to work together. In partnership we can create a better Michigan, for ALL of our children. No exceptions.

With grace, we can do it in the best spirit of human beings everywhere. No exceptions.

Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., State Superintendent

Guiding Principles

1

MAKING YOUR PLAN

Start small and build on existing success; focus on being flexible and giving grace

Teachers and districts should start small and build on existing success. We encourage stakeholders to set and manage expectations, with a focus on being flexible and giving grace. Leverage access to current technical and human resources, and take care of each other as you work collaboratively with stakeholders to help all children and to support parents and caregivers.

2

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

Help students maintain and continue their learning outside the classroom

These unprecedented times provide us with an opportunity to stretch our current efforts and move from providing supplemental learning opportunities to more concerted efforts to help students maintain and continue their learning over this extended period outside the classroom.

3

STUDENT INSTRUCTION

Flexibility, reasonable expectations, connections, and collaboration

All teaching and learning must be guided by flexibility, reasonable expectations, connections with students, and collaboration among educators. It is recognized that not all learning can or will be done through online platforms. MDE will provide guidance and support, but districts are encouraged to do what is best for their students and communities. This is complicated work that must be undertaken with care and supported by collaboration.

4

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers need support and training to best support children and families

Teachers and school staff across the state and the nation are preparing to facilitate learning and support students in ways never before seen. While it is typical of those who work with children to jump right in and do whatever it takes, it is also imperative that these same people have the support and training they need in order to best support children and families. Teachers are life-long learners and must strengthen their efforts to develop young minds. Educators are also presented with a unique opportunity to expand their learning during this unique time with different forms of professional development in distance learning, so that they can reach all learners and continue to help build the next generation of world-changers.

5

PROVIDING SUPPORT

Supporting physical, mental, and emotional health must remain a top priority

These are unprecedented times in which we as an educational community must unify to support our students, their families, the community, and each other. Supporting the physical, mental, and emotional health of our students, educators, families, and communities must remain a top priority. Throughout the duration of this crisis, seek to involve as many stakeholders as possible during your planning process.

Making Your Plan

Learning at a distance will look different across districts. We support the development of solutions that make the most sense given individual districts' communities, parents and caregivers, students, staff, and resources. Schools must continue to provide, and students must continue to receive, the highest level of educational opportunities possible under the difficult circumstances before us. We urge districts to continue to keep equity as a top consideration in local efforts. Districts can expect both successes and failures during this challenging time and should be prepared to pivot from the latter as necessary, given the fast pace of this transition. These are extraordinary times and we all need to have patience and give grace to ourselves and others.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Teachers and districts should start small and build on existing success. We encourage stakeholders to set and manage expectations, with a focus on being flexible and giving grace. Leverage access to current technical and human resources, and take care of each other as you work collaboratively with stakeholders to help all children and to support parents and caregivers.

Planning Resources

Learning at a distance does not necessarily mean online learning. Consider various methods of content delivery and instruction. Districts can use methods like project-based learning, student-guided learning, and other forms of learning that, while they may be facilitated by technology, are not the same as receiving instruction in an online format. Students should not be penalized for their instruction choices or participation capabilities.

Options for Learning at a Distance

Many districts have already developed and implemented plans so that all pupils can access learning at a distance. We encourage districts to update current plans or to continue implementing and improving these plans. Consider sharing plans and ideas through teacher groups, media, and local ISDs.

Districts currently working to develop a model for distance learning should decide what makes sense within their communities and include feedback from teaching and support staff. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has collected [online instructional resources](#) and [professional learning resources](#) focused on delivering instruction at a distance. These resources include district considerations for implementing learning at a distance, as well as resources sorted by content area. These materials will be continually updated through this crisis. These additional planning resources can be helpful to districts:

- [Michigan Virtual's School Closure Learning Continuity Readiness Rubric](#)
- The Michigan Association of Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) provides a [set of online learning guidelines](#) that support districts through creation and implementation of their distance learning plans
- The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) has created a [School Closure Learning Continuity Checklist](#)
- [The National Standards for Quality Online Learning](#)

- The Regional Educational Media Center Association of Michigan (REMC) shares educational resources, professional learning options, and savings opportunities on their [website](#).
- The General Education Leadership Network (GELN)/MAISA have provided the “[MAISA Remote Learning Guidance for Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plans](#).”

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of resources and the list may be updated over time.

District plans should take into consideration the needs of all students at various grade levels as well as guidelines for teacher instructional expectations. It may be helpful to consider a contingency plan to cover instruction if a teacher gets sick during learning at a distance.

Consider appropriate policies related to earning credit, time specifications based on age/grade level, and supporting students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans to the fullest extent possible. Partnerships with special education teachers are key to supporting these students while providing an equitable education. Planning and instruction by classroom teachers needs to be done on a collaborative basis with special education teachers in order to ensure the unique needs of students with IEPs are being addressed. Using the input of elementary specials teachers for cross-curricular assignments is recommended when making these decisions (*see the Student Instruction section for more details*).

District plans must engage teachers, counselors, specialists, coordinators, paraprofessionals, and other staff by asking for their input, and including their contributions. Staff voices are essential as we move forward and attempt to meet the needs of all students. This is an opportunity to expand and ensure that input comes from all voices in a district.

Technological Delivery

Districts should have safe use policies and guidance around conducting live meetings with kids that account for the online privacy of both students and educators alike. Districts are reminded that they continue to hold the responsibilities of the Federal Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) during this learning. Furthermore, districts should consider technology platforms that will account for learning in real-time (synchronous), as well as flexibly timed (asynchronous) options.



Non-Technological Delivery

Districts could consider creating grade-level instructional packets and making them available at schools or other locations throughout the districts. Packet/work pick-up and turn-in could take place in conjunction with school meals pickups or via bus routes. MDE will provide guidance to assist districts with preserving the safety of all during these times.

Access to reading materials for all grade levels can be made available through the Michigan eLibrary (MeL), printed (creative commons) resources, or community “drop box” libraries (minding social distancing guidelines).

Facilitate alternative learning by accessing building resources in compliance with social distancing and mitigation methods adopted by districts with reference to Section III of the Governor’s Executive Order (E.O. 2020-35).



Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities, English Learners, Early Childhood, and Career and Technical Education

The needs and requirements of students with disabilities and of English learners need to be considered when planning learning at a distance. Available resources include the following:

English Learners

The Office of Educational Supports (OES) provides English Learner (EL) resources, including considerations for planning, general guidelines for learning at a distance for ELs, and resources for communicating with parents, as well as links to instructional resources to support meaningful access to [core content](#) and [English language development](#). In addition, the OES team has provided content-specific resources for EL learners in each core content area on the [instructional resources website](#).

Students with Disabilities

The MDE Office of Special Education has issued “Guidance on Compliance with IDEA and the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.” This document is intended to provide support to districts in meeting the established requirements as they provide special education programs and related services (that is, speech therapy, social work and other ancillary services) to students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Guidance and other resources provided by the Office of Special Education and all IDEA Grant Funded Initiatives can be found at the [Special Education button](#) on the MDE COVID-19 Education Information and Resources page. Michigan Virtual has also assembled a resource entitled “[Supporting Students with Disabilities in K-12 Online and Blended Learning](#).”

Early Childhood

The Office of Great Start provides resources for parents, families, and educators working with children ages 0 to 5. These resources can be [found here](#) and include learning videos, books online, and health and wellness information for young learners.

Career and Technical Education

The Office of Career and Technical Education provides resources for online instruction and is developing further guidance and resources for ongoing learning. The additional guidance and resources will be available through a [Career Technical Education button](#) on the MDE COVID-19 Education Information and Resources page.

Essential Practices



GUIDING PRINCIPLE

These unprecedented times provide us with an opportunity to stretch our current efforts and move from providing supplemental learning opportunities to more concerted efforts to help students maintain and continue their learning over this extended period outside the classroom.

Learning and Engagement

Districts and teachers should do their best while recognizing that learning and engagement will vary across children, schools, and districts. Not all children will access all content or learning opportunities in the same way or at the same time. This is why we do not recommend compliance-based teacher accountability requirements, such as a minimum number of students who participate in a daily activity. We do not know what is happening in the homes and lives of students on any given day, and should remain flexible and supportive. Design learning at a distance to try and maximize comprehension and engagement while still considering what you want students to be able to understand and how you will assess that knowledge. This unique time may provide increased opportunities for customized lessons, enabling students to study material that is both interesting to them and allows them to study at their own pace.

Questions to Consider Before You Begin

- What do I need to know about my students to effectively facilitate learning from a distance?
- What technology/apps/student learning platforms are available for me to use and will these become available to my students as well?
- How do I manage or create learning opportunities for my students who have little or no technological resources? What would this process look like?
- How might I reduce and prioritize learning goals or standards?
- How do I manage or create learning opportunities for my students who have little or no technological resources? What would this process look like?
- How can I engage students in a meaningful way, even those without access to adequate technology?
- What forms of assessment would work better in an online setting? How do I have my students demonstrate their learning?
- How do I collaborate with other teachers so I'm aware of how much additional work my students are being given?
- How can I maintain my own mental well-being while still connecting with and supporting my students?

Connecting With Students

Learning at a distance should include connections with students as frequently as possible. This includes but is not limited to:

- Zoom, Google Hangouts, or other live platforms
- Remind
- Bloomz
- Seesaw
- Google Classroom
- Phone or video calls
- Emails
- Letters or postcards home
- Setting up “office hours” for students and families; one resource for this is the app “Calendly.”

Providing frequent feedback to students and finding ways to chat with them can help increase motivation and engagement. Districts should consider enhancing those connections for students who are at a greater risk of learning loss, or those students educators know need additional support.



Flexibility & Collaboration

Overall, it is important to recognize the overwhelming nature of implementing learning at a distance. District leadership should be mindful of the inequities that may exist among staff members within their district regarding internet access. In addition to supporting their students, many teachers are less comfortable with digital tools and may be experiencing additional feelings of anxiety when considering what districts are asking of them. During this isolating time, teachers, administrators, and other school staff are encouraged to collaborate, not only on the topic of academics, but also regarding the social and emotional demands this unfamiliar event is placing on themselves and their own families.

Important Considerations

Keep in mind that parents or caregivers may be disproportionately impacted, and many may not be able to help much with coursework. Learning activities should be designed so as to not require extensive support from parents or caregivers.

It is important to recognize that a variety of additional factors may also affect the individual student experience, including but not limited to: access to technology, internet connection, shared family devices, family needs, and the health of students and their families.

Creating a culturally responsive experience while learning from a distance is critical. Educators should make student well-being a priority, by striving to help their students feel safe and valued while engaging in learning at a distance. Teachers should be responsive to both the academic and social-emotional needs of their students and should continue to build and maintain connections.



Student Instruction



GUIDING PRINCIPLE

All teaching and learning must be guided by flexibility, reasonable expectations, connections with students, and collaboration among educators. It is recognized that not all learning can or will be done through online platforms. MDE will provide guidance and support, but districts are encouraged to do what is best for their students and communities. This is complicated work that must be undertaken with care and supported by collaboration.

What to Teach

Knowing that it will be difficult to teach all the standards before the end of the year, districts should prioritize which standards are most critical for students to learn during this time of closure and narrow their focus to just those. District grade levels and/or departments should collaborate to plan for the content that is to be covered. Every effort should be made to design learning that is reasonable, accessible, and appropriate. It is not advisable to attempt to cover the same breadth or depth of content at a distance. Standards-based instruction should be greatly narrowed in an effort to increase student understanding and to support the varied home lives of our students and their caregivers.

Structuring the Day/Week

Districts should design daily/weekly schedules that work best for their students and families, with a focus on flexibility and giving grace. As education professionals work to provide quality and equitable education, it is important to remember that each district, school, or student's education may look different. Every effort must be made to include teachers and other school staff in these decisions. We also want to acknowledge that Michigan is a local control state, which means many decisions are left to local districts and their governing bodies. The department has the utmost confidence in districts to design schedules that work best for their students and communities. Districts should consider the fact that the experience of school cannot be precisely replicated when designing these schedules.



As much as flexibility is valued, we also must remember that consistency and predictability are important for students and families as they are asked to adjust to a new way of learning. Teachers and staff are strongly encouraged to follow the schedules set forth by their district teams.

We recognize that in many homes, parents or caregivers will become the primary instructor for their children. For this reason, regardless of whether assignments are online or on paper, directions must be clear, concise, and easy to follow. Districts and teachers should take the time to create learning opportunities that work for their students and families and engage parents and caregivers as partners in their children's learning.

Learning at a distance will not look anything like learning in a classroom. We acknowledge and accept that time spent in structured, at-home learning activities will be different when compared to teaching and learning in a traditional or regular school day.

Consistent with guidance provided by a number of other state departments of education, including Kansas, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington, we recommend:

- For elementary and middle school students, districts should consider smaller amounts of time for younger children in grades PK-2 and incremental increases in time for children in grades 3-8. The amount of time will vary by district but should be determined based on the needs of children at varying developmental stages. Learning time should allow for direct instruction, student practice, and enrichment activities.
- For high school students, districts should consider different time frames based upon their specific high school structures and needs. At a minimum, high school students should be expected to accomplish three hours of work daily in this new world. This minimum of three hours may include direct instruction, student practice, and enrichment activities.

Regardless of the grade level, we know that not all students will have the same access to technology or support at home. Below are suggestions for both low/no-tech and high-tech options. Above all, we remind districts and teachers to be thoughtful about these inequalities in access and to give students many ways to be successful.

ELEMENTARY CONSIDERATIONS

We encourage teachers and districts to help create plans that assist parents and caregivers in identifying opportunities for multiple, small doses of activity that will help keep students engaged throughout the day and take into account developmentally appropriate time frames.

Every effort should be made for elementary students to have weekly connections with multiple educators including their own classroom teacher, as well as “specials” teachers and support staff as needed.

ELA & MATH

Districts are encouraged to design weekly schedules that include daily English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics.

SOCIAL STUDIES & SCIENCE

Social studies and science concepts should also be integrated into weekly instruction, possibly alongside or as a part of ELA and math.

SPECIALS

Schedules should provide time each day for both academics and at least one of the “specials” (including PE, music, and art).



READING

Elementary students in PK-K should be reading 15-20 minutes daily, which could include independent reading and/or being read to. The remaining elementary grades should read 20-30 minutes daily, as much as that is attainable.

The Michigan Association for Media in Education (MAME) has developed [lists of eBook, Storytime, and Database resources](#) for Michigan. For those districts without an online platform, providing opportunities for students to access books during packet/food pick up is suggested. Districts may want to consider [First Book](#), which offers funding support and high-quality, low-cost books, as well as free eBooks.

BOOK ACCESS

Districts should make every effort to coordinate with their library media specialists to provide book access for all students. Online platforms can be used to provide reading materials. Families could partner with their school and local libraries for digital library cards and digital reading materials.



SECONDARY CONSIDERATIONS

CHECK-INS

Develop a schedule for teachers to regularly check-in with their students. Scheduled check-ins may also be written or phone conversations with students who lack online check-in capabilities. Efforts must be made to allow all teachers to support their students at regular intervals.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Options for a daily schedule may include a pre-arranged time for each class period to prevent doubling up online activities or attaching specific subjects to certain days. Regardless of the schedule decided upon, every effort should be made for each teacher to connect with their students.

READING

As with elementary, we believe it is important for secondary students to be reading independently for a minimum of 20-30 minutes every day. This should be in addition to their assigned class work. (See page 15 for suggestions on book access.)

OFFICE HOURS

Some students at this age will have other responsibilities (looking after younger siblings, caring for a sick family member, or working an essential job, for example) that will hinder their availability for live meetings or strict due dates. For these reasons, teachers should consider having office hours and encouraging collaboration with peers whenever feasible. Sharing office hour availability with parents and caregivers provides another opportunity to strengthen this partnership. Again, districts and teachers must keep communication lines open, and set clear and flexible expectations.

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

We recommend that lessons/work assigned – whether synchronous, asynchronous, online or on paper – should be focused on flexible delivery of content and collaboration among teachers. Districts may decide how to structure daily student focus, given differences in grade configurations, resources, and expectations. Teachers and support staff should collaborate to ensure students are not overburdened with multiple assignments/lessons related to subjects and class periods.





OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

Be mindful not to burden families that have limited technology or multiple children in their home with too many “live” meeting requests. Remember that the goal is not to replicate a normal 6-7 hour day; that is not feasible or advisable during this extraordinary time. Be creative and be thoughtful about the many other things happening in homes.

For students and families without online access or the desire to utilize live platforms, set aside time each day for students to work on a subject on paper, and possible opportunities for them to contact a teacher via email or phone. One possible idea is for students to take pictures of work completed and submit it via text/email. Districts can also make plans for packet/work pick-up and turn-in as needed.

Sometimes a schedule set up by a teacher is just not going to work for a student or a family. Districts and teachers have to accept this with flexibility and grace, making adjustments as needed to serve students’ needs. These are not typical times, and as such we must be creative with our response.

Districts are reminded to reference MDE’s OSE Guidance on Compliance with IDEA and the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, in combination with the district continuity learning plan. Also, in accordance with federal guidance, districts are encouraged to also complete a contingency learning plan as the district’s offer of free appropriate public education (FAPE) for individual students with an IEP for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year only. Using the contingency learning plan and focused, detailed, consistent documentation, districts will be able to demonstrate their good faith effort in meeting the requirements of the IDEA and MARSE in this learning from a distance environment. A contingency learning plan should address the programs and related services (that is, speech therapy, social work and other ancillary services) for each student with an IEP if the district is unable to fulfill the requirements of the original IEP during this pandemic. For more information about contingency learning plans, please consult the forthcoming MDE OSE guidance document. This document will be updated as more information is made available from the Federal Office of Special Education Programs.

“Districts and teachers have to accept this with flexibility and grace, making adjustments as needed to serve students’ needs. These are not typical times, and as such we must be creative with our response.”

Choosing Resources

The vast number of resources available can become overwhelming for educators and families. For this reason, districts should be intentional and limit their selections to those that align best with their capacity, local vision, and needs of students, and should communicate those choices to families and staff. Districts should ask their staff what they need and be mindful of creating requirements and mandates. Again, flexibility and reason are key.

It is recognized that not all districts have access to the same materials and resources. The Michigan Department of Education has developed a collection of [online instructional resources](#) and [professional learning resources](#) to help districts identify materials appropriate for their students and for educators to learn how to transition to delivering instruction using technology. The online instructional resources include:

- General and district considerations for implementing learning at a distance
- Resources for working with students having specific needs, such as English Learners (EL), special education students, young learners (age 0 to 5), and Career Technical Education (CTE) students
- Resources in specific subject areas including literacy/ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies

Districts are also strongly encouraged to share their ideas with other districts.

[Detroit Public Television](#) has changed its daily programming to align with Michigan curriculum to supplement children's learning during this crisis. Districts can utilize this programming, especially in homes without access to online platforms.

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Ages 2-8

9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Grades 4-8

1 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Grades 9-12



Note: This resource is available in the Detroit Public Television broadcast area, but can be accessed online at www.dptv.org/education.

Assessment and Course Credit

To the extent it is feasible and practical, teachers should provide timely feedback to students based on the work they are completing at home. Teachers are encouraged to be flexible and creative in the ways they provide feedback.

Additionally, although grading policies are the purview of the local districts, **we strongly urge districts to consider adopting a credit/no-credit policy.** This will help to incentivize students to engage in ongoing learning while at the same time recognizing the unusual and challenging situation students face. Districts must recognize that having grading policies without a fully formed plan for absolute equity runs the risk of creating disparities in the education of students, thereby disadvantaging more students than will be advantaged.

Our goal should always be to do no harm to our students or to their teachers. Every effort and intervention must be made to reach and support every student in danger of failure and to offer multiple and varied opportunities for students to complete work. When implementing any grading policy, districts and teachers are strongly encouraged to consider the extent to which students have had equitable access to learning opportunities and adult support during this closure. Further, as Governor Whitmer urged when she issued the Executive Order, districts should continue to work to ensure the graduation of high school seniors. Seniors may continue to complete district requirements even if they are still working on mandatory course work through distance learning. Districts and schools should also generate policies that do not hold individual teachers responsible for a decision if a student has not met the minimum requirements to pass a course.

Professional Development

GUIDING PRINCIPLE



Teachers and school staff across the state and the nation are preparing to facilitate learning and to support students in ways never before seen. While it is typical of those who work with children to jump right in and do whatever it takes, it is also imperative that these same people have the support and training they need in order to best support children and families. Teachers are life-long learners and must strengthen their efforts to develop young minds. Educators are also presented with a unique opportunity to expand their learning during this unique time with different forms of professional development in distance learning, so that they can reach all learners and continue to help build the next generation of world-changers.

Take the Time

- It is critical that districts are intentional about providing the support and the time for learning for staff as well as for students. All staff will need varied and continuous training in new modes of delivering instruction and supports.
- Districts are also encouraged to allow significant time for educators to collaborate in this process to level the learning curve within their communities.
- Districts should also reinforce cross-curricular work within their staff to strengthen the skills of its students. If any of this means taking a day or more to “pause” classwork in order to allow professional development time, districts should feel empowered to take that time.

Do What You Can

To support the ongoing efforts to extend learning during this time, we are recommending that districts – in whatever ways are feasible and practical – engage their staff, students, and communities in learning opportunities that will better prepare everyone for transitioning to learning at a distance. These opportunities will look different in each school community, but communication, clarity, and collaboration are key. We would also expect districts to engage in a continuous improvement model, adjusting and revising plans and supports as necessary.

Involve Your Staff

Districts are encouraged to involve teachers and support staff in the choosing and creation of professional development for staff, in whatever ways are feasible and practical. Teachers, counselors, specialists, and paraprofessionals play integral roles in growing their own professional learning networks, and should be encouraged to collaborate and, when possible, train their colleagues.

Own Your Learning

- Educators in need of State Continuing Education Clock Hours (SCECHs) are encouraged to use this [curated list of free and low-cost online professional learning experiences](#) that are available for all Michigan educators.
- In addition, Michigan's education partners (MACUL, Michigan Virtual, the REMC Association, and Edupaths) have curated and provided recommended training and resources that can help educators prepare to deliver instruction using technology. See MDE's [professional development resource page](#) for more information and professional learning opportunities.
- Elementary teachers should strongly consider completing professional learning opportunities on early literacy, the Literacy Essential modules, through LiteracyEssentials.org. Another strong recommendation is for all educators to consider completion of the free [Social and Emotional modules](#) available through Michigan Virtual.



Think Outside of the [School] Box

We recognize these are not usual times, and as such more leniency and creativity must be employed for teachers to earn this needed professional development. Ideas include, but are not limited to:

- Teachers virtually mentoring other educators
- Cross-curricular planning between teachers and support staff
- Grade- or subject-level planning for consistency across buildings or districts
- District teams collaborating with other districts to design plans together
- Educators earning [Google Certification](#)

Completion of non-traditional professional development focusing on learning at a distance can be used for [SCECHs](#). MDE encourages districts to plan professional development with staff members to ensure that the needs of its members are being met during this time. The MDE will be providing more guidance shortly to educators and districts regarding innovative options for SCECHs, as well as information on certificate renewal and district options for professional development.

Providing Support



GUIDING PRINCIPLE

These are unprecedented times in which we as an educational community must unify to support our students, their families, the community, and each other. Supporting the physical, mental and emotional health of our students, educators, families, and communities must remain our top priority. Throughout the duration of this crisis, seek to involve as many stakeholders as possible during your planning process.

Social/Emotional Supports

Districts need to make plans for contacting families throughout this time. The MDE has released guidance titled “[Social-Emotional Supports in a Crisis](#),” with additional [social and emotional learning resources](#) to assist districts and staff with communication and relationships during this tumultuous period. Communication will look different for every district based on their technological reach, but it will be a vital tool as districts develop strategies to expand learning opportunities and support their students, parents, caregivers, and communities.

For the many districts supporting their communities by meeting the immediate need of nutrition, MDE’s [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP) resources can serve as a guide. It is important to remember that the social-emotional health of students and families is also a critical need that must be addressed. Districts will need to provide mental health support to pupils affected by a state of emergency or state of disaster prompted by COVID-19, which may include grief counseling. Education systems should continue to rely on school counselors and social workers as they seek to meet the social and emotional needs of their students. It is recommended that these individuals offer office hours or other forms of “check-ins” or actively reach out to students. Teaching Tolerance has published an article titled “[A Trauma Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus](#).” The article may assist educators as they address some of the issues educational systems may encounter as they navigate our changing instructional practice. As a reminder, the educational community still must be responsible mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect ([Mandated Reporting 2020-3-23 v1](#)).



“We are delving into uncharted territory, so give yourself and others grace.”

Supports for Student and Staff Learning

Districts are reminded that MDE has resources for assisting in meeting the social and emotional needs of students. Educators are encouraged to review the [Social and Emotional Learning Modules](#) and participate in the professional learning as they help support students. These modules are designed to provide the educational community with practices that can help students thrive beyond academics.

Learn and use trauma-informed practices, when possible. Communication is key; make it ongoing and predictable while providing opportunities for positive feedback between students and teachers. Some other ways to help your students succeed during this time:

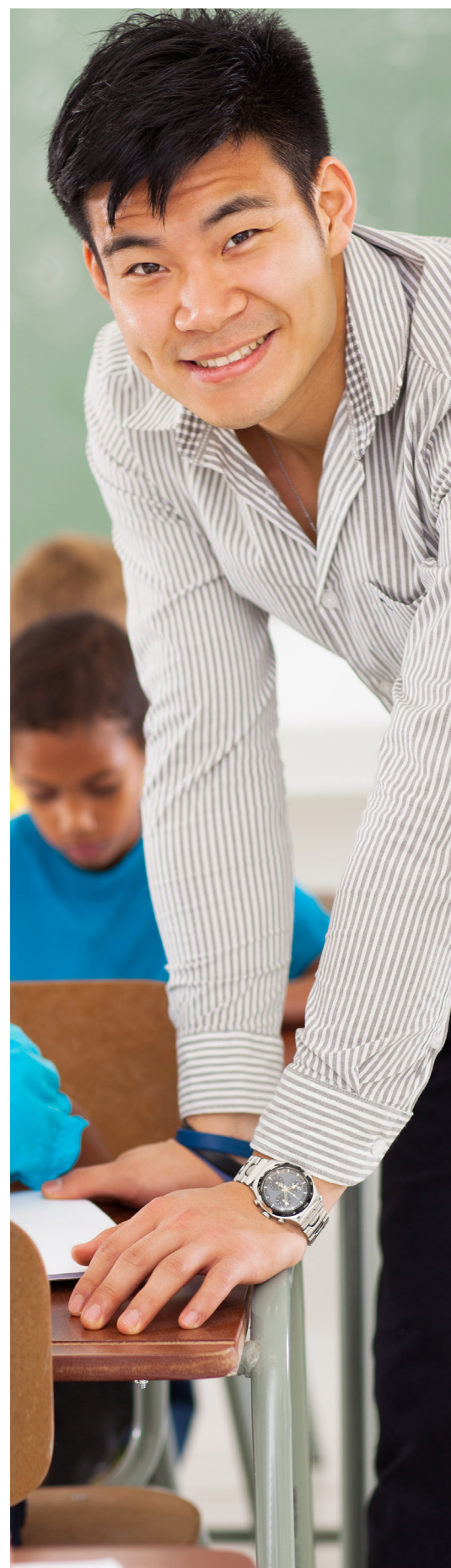
- Establish routines to help build psychological safety, helping children believe that the adults in their lives can take care of them.
- Break directions down into smaller manageable bites.
- Encourage students to reach out to others; possibly organize students into small work groups.
- Foster hope by teaching about historical times of crisis and how those eventually ended.
- Promote physical exercise.

We recognize that learning experiences will vary across schools and districts, as well as among students. Students vary greatly by age, needs, access to and capacity for remote learning, and the ability of parents or caregivers to support this learning as they themselves are facing a host of challenges. As such, MDE would encourage administrators, teachers, and staff to be innovative and creative as they build opportunities to support student learning, such as:

- Partnering and collaborating whenever and wherever possible.
- Using cross-curricular integration to blend learning between the arts, physical education and core subject areas, as these are proven stress relievers and recognize the needs of the whole child.

It is also important to allow educators the opportunity to seek out support from one another. This could include:

- Districts choosing to use professional learning networks (PLNs) or district-provided instructional coaches as a means of supporting educator learning.
- Learning to utilize school and community resources to provide mental health support.
- Acknowledging the student's current situation and context; try not to overwhelm families with excessive homework.
- Celebrating successes and address needs as they arise.





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